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Op-Ed / Opinions and Editorials

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Opinions and Editorials

Against the Grain would like to encourage more opinion editorials on the world we live and work in. Don't be shy. We are all in this together! Send comments and future editorials to any of our editors — KS



These Are The Times that Try Our Souls . . . (from *Acqnet*, March 20, 1994)

by **Christian Boissonnas** (Cornell)

The current issues in librarianship which I am trying to keep on top of are: electronic publishing, cataloging simplification, budgeting in higher education, digitization as a means of preservation, library education, technical services organization, and what should be done about ALA?

These issues define my current job, which involves acquisitions and cataloging broadly defined, indeed, my professional life as a whole. There is a tremendous amount of activity and talk about these matters. So many people are talking about so many things that merely keeping track of what's being said, let alone participating in discussions, is problematical. As we have known for some time now, big changes are in the air. This worries many. Yet, out of this ferment a new library profession will emerge.

I find this exciting and one of my particular interests is to make sure that the newly minted librarians, also known as information scientists, will have in-

corporated in their professional ethos the humanity that defined librarianship as I was taught to practice it.

Many colleagues in many places are helping me understand these issues I mentioned: catalogers, preservation, collection development, and public services librarians.

So, where are the acquisitions librarians?

Why are they not discussing LC's proposal to discontinue tracing of all series? Why are they not considering the implications of the Cooperative Cataloging Council recommendations of this Winter? Why are they not involved with Elsevier in the TULIP Project? (There are lots of librarians involved in the Tulip Project, but not acquisitions librarians) Why are they not taking the lead to help **Sandy Paul** and her friends define standards for the archiving of remote electronic resources, a critical issue since it impacts on whether to acquire such a source locally? Why have they all but stopped talking on ACQNET?

Why are they so quiet?

In previous discussions on this same

issue, some acquisitions librarians would have had me believe that they were so swamped with work, problems, and changes, that they lacked the time or the energy to look outside, beyond their most immediate activities, that they were victims of what my friend **Barbara Winters** calls the "tyranny of the urgent." I have much sympathy for this as I have often felt overwhelmed, especially in the past two years. We are living in trying times, and not only because of budgets. It is not just budgets that are forcing us to reorganize, but also the fundamental changes that are taking place in our profession. Yet, our colleagues in other areas of librarianship are equally busy and manage to be involved.

Two years ago **Ross Atkinson** threw a challenge to acquisitions librarians to take a leadership role in the changing publishing landscape or risk disappearing as a profession. It is not clear to me that they have picked up the challenge. Why? Because the acquisitions profession is already dead? Because it never really was alive? If not, what is it waiting for?

We're Old, But We're Not That Old

by **Judy Webster** (University of Tennessee) and **Katina Strauch** (College of Charleston)

Back in March, 1994, we read this editorial by **Christian Boissonnas**. We can't explain what was going through our minds, but like so many things in life, we put it aside and made a mental note to reply to it sometime (sooner, rather than later). Anyway, it is now September, 1994. That's not too bad in the academic environment, at least. It's still 1994.

We want to reply to Christian with a **Call to Action**. A call to action for ac-

quisitions librarians and catalog librarians and collection development librarians. **A Call to Action for Technical Services Librarians**. And especially for acquisitions librarians.

The Internet is a Tower of Babel and, frankly, life has become a clawing through the Savager and Savager Marketplace. Even people at work who we used to fight with are allies in this new war. Gone are the days when we could steel ourselves with 3x5 cards of book and journal order requests looking toward a bright future. Now, chaos is right outside the door, or we should say inside our computer!

There are certain "givens" that, like it or not, we seem stuck with since many of us are too young to retire. Here are some of them —

- Librarianship isn't what it used to be. It's more flexible and dynamic. We won't be retiring from the same kinds of jobs we selected in the beginning of our careers.

- Libraries are becoming even more popular than they used to be. This is because they can offer gateways to worlds of even more information. And we're not talking about interlibrary loan. We're talking about access to catalogs

And We Weren't There

Art Brody and the Sheets of Plastic

by Nat Bodian (Publisher's Marketing Consultant)

Out of high school, the youngster held a variety of jobs, none too successfully. One had been as a shoe clerk at Bamberger's Department Store in downtown Newark, but he had been fired for insubordination to his manager.

His father had a drug store on Bergen Street in Newark and the youngster helped out with rentals from the drug store rental library. He noticed that after a few circulations the book jackets became so tattered the books could no longer be circulated..

He had an idea. He bought some sheets of plastic and cut them a bit larger than the book jacket size. To fold the rigid plastic sheets, he used the rubber rollers from an old washing machine wringer in his basement. With the plastic wrapped around the paper book jacket, the books had an indefinite life and could be re-rented again and again. Here was an idea he felt sure would be of interest to libraries.

He accumulated about \$100 and went to the *Library Journal* in the R.R. Bowker

offices in New York City. He met with the advertising manager, told him of his idea, and asked his help in drafting an ad to libraries offering the plastic book jacket covers for sale. He asked for as much



advertising as his \$100 would buy.

The ad pulled well and the young man filled all the orders and took all the income from the ad and reinvested it in a larger advertisement in *Library Journal*.

He repeated this many times with larger space. Slowly, he was building a business as a manufacturer and supplier of plastic book jacket covers to libraries.

From that modest start and effort, young **Arthur Brody** became the father of an industry — the plastic book jacket cover industry and from that modest effort rose the firm of **Bro-Dart Industries**, named for Art Brody.

Years after the founding of Bro-Dart Industries, librarians and booksellers often wondered why Bro-Dart Industries was so often the largest single advertiser in most issues of *Library Journal*. If they had inquired of the company head, he probably would have told them it was his way of paying back *Library Journal* for helping him to get his start in the business. ☞

NB: This story was assembled from three individuals, Arthur Brody, who told me of his start and of the washing machine, the Bamberger's Department Store shoe department manager who had been Brody's employer, and the advertising manager of Library Journal who designed and wrote young Brody's first advertisements to help get him started in the business.) — Nat Bodian

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and databases all over the world. Because of this, personnel are being stretched more and more. But we are being stretched because we KNOW something and we have a valuable contribution to make to individuals and to society.

- We are still buying print books and journals, but we are buying a lot of other things — CD-ROMS, electronic journals, articles, full text access, etc., etc.

- Outsourcing is going on in Technical Services. Katina doesn't like it, but in a lot of cases, it makes sense. Judy does like it when it is cost-effective and efficient. After all, sending our orders to vendors rather than to publishers was the original outsourcing before outsourcing became a word.

- There are a lot of sources out there on the Internet for Technical Services work. They change every day and it takes tons of time to keep up with them.

- Even off the Internet, there are so many new resources out there every day, we have trouble keeping up with them. The mind becomes jaded and overcrowded. We need an extra hard disc to

carry around for offsite storage of the information we should be able to keep in our brains.

- We are forced to learn stuff about issues that we barely knew about last year. And it's not just copyright, intellectual property, licensing agreements, site licensing. We're talking about SGML and Z39.50 and EDI and FTP.

- Technical Services librarians are what librarianship has been all about. We started cataloging and organizing knowledge way back many years ago. We started selecting and acquiring the best of woman's knowledge. We started making bibliographies to give a system to that knowledge. Public Service librarians are great (If you can believe it, we both used to be one in another life.), but Technical Services librarians have put the ACTION in librarianship as a profession.

- The Savage Marketplace of the information society is becoming so overcrowded and overpopulated that it is being driven by the end consumer rather than the information scientist. That is not necessarily bad, but the information scientist needs to keep her eye on the ball — the ball is the changing scope of information and publishing. We should

not be scared of disappearing, we should be excited about emerging as leaders in this Savage Marketplace!

We don't know if the tail is wagging the dog or if the dog is wagging the tail. But we DO know that we want to play a role in shaping our future and the future of libraries and the future of society. If we just stand around and do nothing, somebody else will figure out the next step. Why can't that somebody include us — you and me and even **Christian** and **Ross Atkinson** and **Sandy Paul** and **John Tagler** and everybody who has something to contribute?

The Charleston Conference is coming November 3-5. Why don't we use the **Rump Session, 4-6 PM on Saturday, November 5**, to make inroads? Why don't we set up Task Forces or Working Groups or whatever to make statements on some of these issues? Such statements will not be bound by ALA or MLA or AALL or anything like that. They won't have to go through committees and Councils and editorial boards and hierarchies. And that is okay. They will be statements and plans composed by interested and *committed professionals* in the scholarly information chain.

We can do it. How about it?? ☞